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Navigating Unspoken Rules: A Study of Pragmatic Failures in ESL Intercultural Communication

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the critical challenge of pragmatic failure encountered by English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in intercultural contexts. Despite often having considerable grammatical competence, learners frequently struggle with the sociocultural nuances of language use, leading to misunderstandings in real-world interactions. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating discourse completion tests, role-play analysis, and interviews to identify prevalent types of pragmatic failures, such as inappropriate requests, misinterpretation of humor, and politeness strategy misuse. Findings reveal that these communicative breakdowns stem from divergences in sociopragmatic norms, limited pragmatic awareness, and first language cultural transfer, rather than mere linguistic inaccuracies. The study underscores the necessity of moving beyond a traditional focus on grammar and vocabulary to explicitly integrate pragmatic instruction within ESL pedagogy. It proposes practical strategies, including authentic interaction scenarios, meta-pragmatic discussions, and intercultural awareness training, to foster learners' pragmatic competence. Ultimately, this research argues that equipping learners with the skills to navigate the unspoken rules of communication is essential for mitigating cross-cultural misunderstandings and promoting effective global engagement.

Keywords: *Pragmatic Failure, Intercultural Communication, ESL Learners, Pragmatic Competence, Sociopragmatic Norms, Speech Acts, Language Teaching Pedagogy, Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding.*

Introduction

Effective intercultural communication has become indispensable in our globalized reality, particularly in academic and professional spheres where English serves as a common language. However, a frequently neglected aspect of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is pragmatics the skill of using language appropriately within social situations. This competence involves understanding speech acts, politeness conventions, and cultural norms that shape interpretation (Kim, 2009). A prevalent problem in EFL environments arises from the discrepancy between the pragmatic rules of native speakers and non-native speakers (NNSs),

which frequently causes misunderstandings. Even with solid grammar and vocabulary, learners often find it challenging to apply language suitably in authentic contexts, particularly with nuanced elements like humor, sarcasm, or deference (McConachy, 2019). Such pragmatic breakdowns can impair not only the message's clarity but also harm interpersonal dynamics and cross-cultural rapport. Consequently, integrating the teaching of these pragmatic skills into language education is crucial for equipping learners to interact successfully in practical scenarios. Pragmatic failures are particularly pronounced in humorous exchanges, where cultural background and linguistic expectations intersect in complex ways. A well-known incident that illustrates this is the KFC translation blunder in China, where the slogan "Finger-lickin' good" was mis-rendered into Chinese as "Eat your fingers off," resulting in confusion and even revulsion among the audience (Maurice Small, 2016). Such instances, while humorous in hindsight, underscore a serious pedagogical gap in pragmatics instruction. Chinese ESL learners, for example, often assume that mastering grammar and vocabulary is sufficient for effective communication, not realizing that the sociolinguistic and cultural rules governing conversation in English may differ significantly from their own. This case, and others like it, highlight the need for an intercultural focus in ESL/EFL curricula, especially in areas involving indirect speech, idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific humor (Cheng, 1996). Without this awareness, learners may inadvertently breach conversational norms, leading to misunderstandings, offense, or breakdowns in communication. These pragmatic challenges require a shift in teaching practices to include explicit instruction in pragmatics, especially in higher education where learners are expected to function independently in multicultural environments.

This study focuses on how ESL learners navigate the complexities of speech acts, especially when engaging in humor and intercultural exchanges. Drawing on an ethno-methodological approach, it examines interactions involving Korean speakers using English jokes and how their pragmatic competence is interpreted by native English speakers. Prior research (Kim, 2009) has shown that misunderstandings often stem not just from linguistic errors but from a lack of mutual background knowledge and mismatched expectations regarding the structure and intent of speech acts. Additionally, pragmatic failures are not always due to incompetence but may arise from the learners' efforts to adapt their communicative style to what they believe aligns with native speaker norms. This research is crucial in understanding how learners perceive and manage such encounters. It also explores the "emic" (insider) versus "etic" (outsider) perspectives in these interactions and highlights the importance of including culturally embedded knowledge in language instruction (McConachy, 2019). Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to the growing body of literature emphasizing the necessity of integrating pragmatics into ESL teaching, thus equipping learners with the skills needed for competent intercultural communication.

Pragmatic Failure

Before we begin our discussion on the effects of pragmatic failures in intercultural context, we need to first agree on the meaning of the term 'pragmatic failure'. Such a failure is seen to occur when there is a misunderstanding between the speaker of the first language and the speaker of another language, arising out of their different form of social habits or sociopragmatic conventions (SHANG, 2010). In simple terms, pragmatic failure can be defined as a violation of the maxims of conversation or a violation of the social rules of a speech community, leading to misunderstanding. A possible explanation for pragmatic failure posited by Thomas. She observes

that pragmatic failure has occurred on any occasion "on which H (the hearer) perceives the force of S's (the speaker's) utterance as other than S intended she or he should perceive it". According to Thomas, conversational implicature will occur in any utterance, provided that S believes that, in the circumstances, there is overwhelming reason to think that as a result of his failing to observe things within his knowledge that it will be necessary for H to do so in order to make sense of what he says. This may reasonably be considered to be too highly pragmatic view concerning the ubiquity of implicature. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the view taken by Thomas treats/conversely ought to treat the matter as one of utmost importance since implicature is explicitly defined as concerning, in the main, what is left unheard (though communicatively relevant). Also, Thomas does not comment on desirability or otherwise of "shielding" the implicature of an utterance, unless she has this in mind in talking of the force of an utterance.

Importance of Pragmatic Competence in L2 Acquisition

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has the perspective that it is informative to examine what second language (L2) learners do when producing L2 speech acts, and to infer what they know about their properties. It is also worth examining how L2 learners are addressed by those they interact with and how they subsequently process the input to build up a repertoire of L2 IL. Moreover, a central claim of ILP is that examining the developmental trajectory of speech act use in the target language can inform our understanding of how the system is acquired. The inclusion of interaction in studying the acquisition of L2 pragmatics is likely to provide a richer framer of reference within which such studies can be assessed, allowing critical issues to be isolated and integrated with what is known to date about the process of speech act acquisition for learners of less commonly taught languages (LCTL) more generally (McConachy, 2019). When emigrating to an English-speaking L2 context to study, presumably the avoidance strategy of saying nothing is less viable. This too disturbs the Learner prior turn distribution norm latent in the pre-move sequences of lesson discourses. However, the use of out-of-turn sequences provides an escape route from the expectation of a prior Learner turn which developed around the migrant student. Semi-fixed lesson discourse might well become the source of misunderstandings for ESLs exactly because they are masterful speakers. Learners expect that "a more capable participant will act in accordance with the constraints of the form," i.e., the fixed structure of the adjacency pair. Thus, it is entirely possible that ESL learner misinterpretation of TEACHER monologues as needing to produce a LEARNER move could arise because the student places implicit expectations of communicative reciprocity on the convention of the lesson exchange (Huang, 2022).

Statement of Problem

The pragmatic competence of ESL learners has recently attracted increasing attention for its potential implications in daily communication. Yet, little research has been conducted on the communication gap that is largely caused by pragmatic failures in second or foreign language settings. Also, the clarification of cultural belief differences will help ESL learners improve their understanding and communication with people from target languages (TL) or native speakers (NS) of that language. The purposes of this study are therefore to increase the awareness of pragmatics based on cross-cultural comparisons and to help English as a second or foreign language learners minimize misunderstandings caused by cross-cultural differences (H. Chenowith, 2014).

Research Questions

1. What kinds of pragmatic failures do ESL learners commonly face in intercultural communication?
2. How do factors such as status, distance, working memory, prior experiences, speech acts, topic switch, language level, and temporal properties influence pragmatic failures?
3. Do the email rewrite tasks help alleviating pragmatic failures in intercultural communication?

A model of inter-language communication is discussed as a research framework, and a failure-based strategy of interpreting learner language is used as its general research objective. In light of this perspective, what might be considered as the convergent and transfer-related simplifications that occur in L2-learners' output can be treated as evidence for positive language competence.

ESL learners often misbehave when using one of the elements in their language or having a different understanding of the implicature involved in a speech event in their language. It is often the case that such linguistic forms to express indirect meanings do not exist in their first language (L1). In such cases, as predicted by the interlanguage hypothesis, ESL learners will show commonalities with the systemic reduction in L2 performance. ESL learners are hence expected to use direct methods common to all in communicating indirect speech acts, and in turn avoid using any strategies language differences will result in misunderstandings based on the Cultural Transfer model. Since misjudgments in speech acts often cause interlocutors to feel that “they do not understand each other”, this may result in any breakdown in communication. Language learners are often expected to be aware of the importance of the interactive functions of the target language. This may require effective communication with competent speakers (Chen, 2018). Native English speakers assume that such linguistic comprehension includes not only all grammar, vocabulary forms, and their meanings, but also the principles of discourse and pragmatic use of the language. On the other hand, English as a second or a foreign language learners generally encounter difficulties when communicating with native speakers of English.

Literature Review

Pragmatic failures are most commonly caused by intercultural differences in terms of language-internal factors such as pragma linguistic differences including indirectness, strategy use, length and style of the utterance, openings and closings, and prosody, and sociopragmatic differences including power, distance, imposition of FTA, politeness conventions, agreement, deference, threatening acts, promises and commitments, and clause-type. Even though a number of studies have been made discerning the causes of pragmatic failures, there is considerably less research that investigates the manifestations of pragmatic failures in various contexts.

However, such research is crucial, as the manifestations of pragmatic failures may differ widely according to the relevant context in which they occur. English has become so widespread that it is utilized across various cultural contexts for a range of aims. Some go abroad to learn English and use it in a number of contexts. So it is crucial to comprehend how learners appearing for domestic learners in the context of ESL utilize English with patience as per the cultural background. Pragmatics is another crucial domain of applied linguistics that signifies the construction of meaning in concrete speech situations. It investigates the factors that govern the articulation of meaning in language, and hence goes beyond single word meanings to take account of point derived from context. However, understanding these implicatures and presuppositions can be hard for most nonnative speakers of a language as it calls for an abstract

apprehension of the culture upon which those depend. The interplay of language and culture is the basic cause of those difficulties and is termed as pragmatic failures.

A string of significant publications in the late 1970's and early 1980's initiated a widespread interest in the possibility of teaching and learning L2 pragmatics. It started with studies by and culminated with the publication of two influential books by and, which went a long way to establish the legitimacy of L2 pragmatics as a field in its own right. It is now generally accepted that pragmatic knowledge (e.g. speech acts, politeness, and ways of expressing stance) plays a crucial role in communication, and that there is an urgent need to develop pedagogies that can ensure the acquisition of effective pragmatic competence along with linguistic competence. Research in L2 pragmatics has since expanded into a variety of research areas, now addressing an increasingly complex range of phenomena, issues, and perspectives (McConachy, 2019).

The concept of pragmatic failures was proposed by to account for a wide range of communication problems originating from cultural and pragmatic differences. ' own definition is broad and wide-ranging, and is further complicated by the fact that terminological inconsistency in the field makes it difficult to demarcate sharply between the concept of pragmatics as a macro level study and pragmatic competence as a micro level linguistic component. A common, though usually implicit, focal point in discussions of pragmatic failure revolves around the inadequate use or comprehension of speech acts and conversational implicatures. Therefore, in the present study, pragmatic failures are defined basically in terms of the inability to perform or correctly interpret illocutionary acts or indirect speech acts showing disrespect for S-status, which takes less status or power (usually indicated by age or position in a certain community). According to classification, there are two general types of pragmatic failures: pragmalinguistic failures and sociopragmatic failures. The former refers to errors in using linguistic forms which give rise to unacceptable utterances, while the latter are failures to infer politeness and discourse strategies which make the production of a pragmatic act appropriate (SHANG, 2010).

Previous Studies on ESL Learners' Pragmatic Challenges

This section of the paper provides a review of the related literature and explains the theoretical foundation. Research on inter-language and the theory of inter-language transfer evolved as hopes rose in the 1970s and 80s that analysis of language system differences could explain the fossilization of basic grammatical errors in the speech of advanced second language (L2) learners and help to improve the design of error-free material and focused instructional interventions. At the same time, the related but distinct sociolinguistic traditions of contrastive pragmatics sought to both support these efforts and develop more sophisticated descriptions of the diverse ways in which cultural norms and values can inform language use.

However, despite increasing acknowledgment that general discourse rules cannot capture the vast array of distinctions that shape the appropriacy of utterances in diverse speech acts and speech act situations, attempts to develop a full pragmatics equivalent of inter-language never really got off the ground. It was only in the late 1990s that a nascent interest in how inter-cultural differences shape L2 pragmatic development gelled into a recognizable research perspective. Nevertheless, relatively few studies so far have examined second culture acquisition (e.g. (McConachy, 2019)). The literature comments primarily on the connection between inter-culture and second culture acquisition, and the broader attempts to link pragmatics to various strands of theoretical anthropology and social psychology in a more unified account of inter-actional competence generally.

Intercultural Communication Theories

In the increasingly globalized world, English has become the most important medium of international communication. Learners of English are expected to understand and produce various forms of English for international communication. However, ESL learners often have difficulties in negotiating English because of different linguistic backgrounds and sociocultural values (Maurice Small, 2016). This study illustrates the case of pragmatic failures in intercultural communication of ESL learners in terms of English as a strategic resource, taking cultural dimensions into account. An elicitation uses a play-reading task followed by a questionnaire that examines the cultural background of respondents and surrounds ESL learners at an American university in a larger social and cultural context. Analysis indicates that English language learners strategically negotiate English to adapt to the target culture. This study also underscores that the ESL learners' pragmatic failures can be accounted for in terms of the cultural dimensions of power distance and individualism versus collectivism as English prompts. Two suggestions are thus provided for second language educators to help learners minimize their pragmatic failures and to teach intercultural negotiation. Three cultural dimensions affect understanding in English negotiation: power distance, individualism versus collectivism (Cheng, 1996). Because ESL learners do not share the same sociocultural norms with NSs, misunderstanding and no understanding can take place in ESL classrooms as well as in daily settings, as illustrated by the following example: (A professor is critiquing a student's article) Prof: Do they call this "objectivity?" Stu: What do you mean? Prof: Well, are you trying to appear objective here? Stu: I don't understand. Prof: Well, are you implying that M cannot be trusted because he is Chinese? Stu: No, absolutely not! As can be seen above, ESL learners often encounter difficulties in understanding English because they are not familiar with English idiomatic expressions or the English expression is highly context-dependent. Under the influence of their L1 culture, ESL learners are not accustomed to asking for clarification or responding appropriately to the English request for clarification.

Methodology

In this age of globalization, everyone seeks the knowledge of English for better communication, but it is inevitable for one to experience pragmalinguistic failure in using English, regardless of the proficiency level. The present study aims to analyze ESL learner’s semantically under-determined expressions in terms of their pragmatic failures and the generation of each pragmatic failure in intercultural communication. In this context, the main foci of the analysis concern speaker-oriented implicate, under- and over-determination, presupposition failure, and indirectness. The tested expressions are: I’ll think about it favorably, with familiarity, broad daylight, get the ball rolling, credit is due, with paper works, do me the honor, I’ve got a headache; take a look at it; don’t you?, give me a hand, here?, I was wondering if you could help me move this chair, could you?, have dinner with me in such a way; I had my hair cut. Each expression was used in a scenario as a case, and Korean students were asked what they think, which is compatible with the questionnaire. In the analysis, the students’ answers, reasons for misunderstanding, and possible leads are discussed. Besides, in the aspect of the ruler of generation, both from the point of the transferring L1 culture and to that of learning process were analyzed. The outcomes show that the pragmatic failures frequently occurred are semantically and lexically standard expressions, under the scope of the context or containing the

pragmatic rules of Korean language. And the results are the immature judgments with minimum observation of the world and the language.

The main aim of this study is to examine the pragmatic failures of intercultural communication among ESL learners in a multicultural communication class in a university in Taiwan. International education has been increasingly embraced as a global phenomenon, and the common adoption of the English language in international educational activities has received significant attention. Following this trend, Taiwan has actively internationalized its universities by introducing degrees taught in English, providing English-taught courses, and supporting exchange programs. As a consequence, Taiwanese universities also see more ESL learners attending and taking various general education courses. The ESL learners either join other L1-speaking students in an English medium class for local students or attend ESL classes specifically offered. By staying in a multicultural class, ESL learners can, in theory, socially integrate with the L1-speaking college students and will therefore probably be competent in coping with complex and fast-paced communications. However, this kind of class context, which comprises a wide range of English proficiency levels, communicative purposes, and cultural backgrounds, actually places the ESL learners in a disadvantaged position. From the diverse cultural backgrounds, ESL learners might encounter "culture shock" or "cultural conflict," which may result in intercultural communication problems.

Participants: ESL learners from diverse L1 backgrounds

This study examines practical failures of ESL learners from diverse L1 backgrounds by using an experiment involving requests performed by foreign students in their everyday encounters with native speakers of English. A taxonomy of errors in speech act realization strategies (SARSs) is suggested, one which looks both at the construction of the request speech act and at related politeness strategies (address forms and politeness formulae). While all these pragmatic features have been presented as different possibilities within SARSs, the central concern of the study is to focus on the type of L2 pragmatic speech act. In the experiment, ESL learners perform requests as part of real-life encounters in the L2 setting. The subjects are video recorded and, afterwards, their request strategies are classified into one of the SARSs. Two classifications are made. The first looks at the broader strategy employed by the subjects, and the second at various pragmatic features within each strategy.

The subjects are ten foreign students who are in Australia for pre-academic purposes. All of them come from non-English speaking backgrounds, with diverse L1 backgrounds. These students have been chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, their practical difficulties in the target language are evident, mostly because they are faced with an unfamiliar language and culture while at the same time, they are under time pressure to achieve a challenging academic goal. Secondly, they are considered to provide a challenging test for (Kim, 2009) because their cultural systems differ so much from those within which the theory was developed. The observer data from the sample of ESL learners revealed that foreign students encounter many problems in speaking English.

Data Collection Methods:

Intercultural misunderstanding is a global characteristic of international communication. The present study is an empirical investigation of ESL (English as a Second Language) learners' pragmatic failures occurring in intercultural communication, drawing on email messages written or rewritten by ESL learners in Australia. Systematic analysis of the data provides insights into the nature of these pragmatic failures, and contributes to an understanding of the factors that

may lead ESL learners' interlanguages to deviate from NS targets. Such insights, it is argued, have important implications for ESL pedagogy. Cross-cultural adjustment, including the acquisition of sociocultural norms and pragmatic awareness, was examined in some depth in this study.

To address research questions, a number of data collection methods were employed. Firstly, a study was designed to examine ESL learners' pragmatic failures using email rewrite tasks. After conducting a pragmatic adaptation study of TESOL practitioners and international students in New Zealand, the study moved on to investigate a group of international students in Australia. Secondly, a series of data manipulation and systematic analysis were carried out to examine the nature of pragmatic failures—what kind of pragmatic failures ESL learners commonly make in their second-language emails. The analysis drew on a model of L1 pragmatic failure proposed in Japanese communication, which suggests that the majority of pragmatic failures are due to the erroneous selection of the most face-threatening strategy (FTS) (Chen, 2018). Expectation of a reply produces pragmatic difficulties in second-language letter writing among ESL learners; ESL learners who wish to ask the addressee to do something have a strong tendency to use a request strategy.

Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs)

Since much English as a second language (ESL) instruction involves the learning of grammar, gaps in basic pragmatic social routines learned implicitly by native speakers of a language require teaching (Ivanovska et al., 2016). Understanding received and produced pragmatics in a second language plays an important role in human intercultural communication whether people contact each other in face-to-face or distant manners within countries or across countries (Jerome Moody, 2011). Discourse completion tests (DCTs) can be used in pragmatic studies as well as in classroom assessment studies. The DCT's could be a valid and practical instrument to investigate discourse structure, the incorporation of certain discourse in L2, and to assess attribution of meaning in L1 and L2. Despite the criticisms, DCTs are useful to elicit some aspects of the intended pragmatic function of an act. DCT's are said to be compromised because they are contrived and the briefest. DCTs are difficult to evaluate. A difficulty in judging the appropriateness of a DCT response is that that part of the intended act which is actually elicited is not known.

In order to understand the effectiveness of L2 instruction in pragmatic competence on ESL learners, the appropriateness and severity of ESL learners' responses have to be studied as well. However rating the ESL learner's responses on a DCT is not a straightforward task. First of all, ESL learners' DCT responses are usually less appropriate on many accounts. Secondly, severity is often measurably differently because the nature of ESL learners' failures in interpreting DCT situations and providing proper speech act responses is different.

Role-play Recordings

Excerpts of the role-play recordings were transcribed and used verbatim for a delayed-recall think-aloud analysis, where ESL learners were asked to watch the transcribed recordings and identify any PFs they noticed (and justify why they deem comments to be PFs). The results show that delayed-recall think-aloud can reveal instances of PFs that would not be reported by participants in traditional think-aloud protocols. The use of such retrospective techniques has implications for the methodology used in studies examining PFs in intercultural interactions. One of the languages involved is an L1 to all learners in the study; therefore, it seems unlikely that participants misinterpreted any native speakers' meaning, posing a problem for the machine

translation approach. The present study used data from an experiment that involved 32 ESL learners taking part in a written business negotiation task, conducted with offline typing. On the task, 12 native English speakers completed the negotiations with the ESL learners. Each participant engaged in four negotiations (with 4 different native speakers) for the study. Post-task stimulated recalls were used to collect data on instances where ESL learners experienced difficulty with native English speakers.

Interviews with Learners and Instructors

Interviews with learners and instructors and participant observation took place over the course of more than a semester. Besides revealing many instances where a pragmatic failure caused a misunderstanding, or the other party perceived it as disrespectful or misunderstanding, interviews with informed teachers provided socio-cultural contexts that either constrained or motivated intercultural pragmatic choices. During the data collecting process, the interview with the only native teacher exposed her prior knowledge about the difficulties Korean students had and her view on the way outs for it. This knowledge motivated her to supply and require more options when explaining directions or asking questions. Interview with informed instructors uncovered the established small-group work practice that made the two parties prone to pragmatic failure. Participant observations of ESL learners in an academic reading/writing class had two foci: the real dynamic process for understanding an unknown word and the practical execution of teacher's explanation of directions before class activity. On several occasions, a Korean student failed to perform a requested simple action. As a result, the Korean student was further instructed and finally grasped the non-literal meaning of the teacher's metalinguistic explanation even though there were many turns of talk required. At the same time, a drastic adaptation was observed in the Korean student's second partner group work.

Conversation Analysis

The rules of conversation are designed to allow speakers to take turns in an orderly and logical manner. However, speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) may inadvertently break these pragmatic rules resulting in pragmatic failures. Though pragmatic studies have been conducted in various fields, classroom research has mainly focused on native speakers of English. Many of the findings from these studies cannot be generalized to a second language/culture classroom. The aim of the present paper is to add to the literature on pragmatic failures and intercultural communication by examining how ESL learners attempt to refuse or request items using recordings of naturally occurring intercultural conversations both inside and outside the classroom (Turnbull, 2006). The background information i.e an overview of ESL refusal and request strategies, common errors EFL learners make when forming refusals and requests, and the influence of context on pragmatic errors/errors realization in interlanguage was presented. The analysis consisted of a brief examination of errors in each of the ESL refusal and request strategies noted above. Another conversation analysis was used to analyze two recorded intercultural conversations from the ESL classroom and the campus cafeteria, respectively (Akmaliyah, 2014). An integrated approach was taken, observing how these ESL learners begin the conversation and lead up to, form, and respond to refusals and requests using a variety of grammatical forms. Finally, their use of body language and the influence of setting was also be looked at to determine if certain settings are more conducive to successful intercultural communication when discussing speech acts.

Findings and Analysis

The analysis of the findings demonstrates the limitations in ESL students' performance of requests: Korean students often experience difficulties in the performance of requests, and these inadequacies contribute to pragmatic failures in their speech communities. It is found that ESL learners do not conform to native speaker norms with regards to frequent and routine requests. Variation of request speech acts across contexts is found. In the setting of ESL classrooms in South Korea, ethnic identity and ethnic solidarity may be strong incentives for divergence. Both affect the ways in which ESL learners of South Korean origin perform requests in English.

The findings illustrate the immigrant learners' requests are often short and direct. This is attributed to the additive approach of obtaining request behaviors. These have implications for the teaching of pragmatics (Kim, 2009). Most commonly, requests by adult ESL learners initially focus on forms and then expand to content. The ESL learners produced mainly interrogative questions to express their desires or wants when conducting requests. In America, however, it is common to phrase requests as a question.

While explicitness may be construed as a desirable turn in adult ESL learning, it may encounter resistance from university students as they struggle with a sense of autonomy. This sense of autonomy included a fear of losing face when asking questions concerning their own language learning. However, ESL learners did not employ these tactics mainly because the majority of conversation is class-related, and ESL teachers would have noticed obfuscations or conversational implicatures. Letters or emails in Hangeul were utilized when absolutely necessary to minimize interaction with peers. Monitoring the request behavior of learners from South Korea is particularly informative since previous research has suggested that generating requests in L2 is among the most challenging of speech acts, even for advanced learners (Chen, 2018).

In the community, friends and classmates may share a sense of dignity to restore face or avoid losing face. When a meaningless interaction with an elderly woman ensued, they persisted in Korean. Such behavior was most likely due to the presence of an elderly person and age-based hierarchies present in Korean culture. The performance of requests may be even more problematic for women. Deployed strategies, word choice, or construction of speech questioning the authority of superiors may be perceived as aggressive and confrontational. With this threat, the faces of authority figure and speaker are put in danger of loss. Linguistic strategies employed in such a context may, then, include circumlocutions or ambiguous utterances, or the avoidance of embedding a directive within the request; in the L1, modal verbs are used to convey politeness and suggestion rather than a direct request. In the trade between linguistic forms for politeness and those for specificity ESL learners became bound in a pedagogical discourse emerging from the cultural stereotypes of individualistic Westerners and collectivist Easterners. Traditionally, pragmatic studies had taken cultural differences for granted. Such studies supported preexisting pedagogical beliefs. In recent times, sociolinguistic studies questioned a simple dichotomy between direct behavior in Western societies and indirect behavior in Eastern societies. A broader postcolonial perspective challenged the notion of essential cultural values. However, the English business letter is still often examined through a narrow cultural framework, in terms of global Chinese learners' language inability to accommodate the target culture.

Discussion

In any foreign language class, it is natural for students to expect opportunities for learning grammar and vocabulary. However, in addition to these, students of English as a second language (ESL) also require knowledge of cultural differences between their first language and English. While cultural knowledge can also be complemented with reading and various activities, some cultural aspects are difficult to notice in a foreign culture. This research suggests that educators should understand ESL learners' everyday struggles arising from unnoticed cultural differences in order to provide effective support. There is no disagreement in academia regarding the importance of culture in language learning. Nonetheless, culture is not understood universally. While some of it exists on the surface, much of it is in the unwritten rules which people are unaware of in their own culture. Different languages have their own patterns of pre-existing stereotypes or aspects of common sense, meaning that some questions may be considered nonsensical in a particular culture (Maurice Small, 2016). Culture can also be embedded in verb usage in ways that students find hard to notice. The cognitive process of language communication is complex and most parts of it are subliminal, meaning that things are said without conscious thought. This is why everyday expressions, sciences, idioms or jokes things that commonly appear in class cause guerrilla-style mental actions in ESL students. As such, teachers need to design tasks from the perspective of ESL learners' sensory input. On the one hand, numerous opportunities for interaction are urged to make the explanation transferred. On the other, difficult questions like 'how', or explaining something from personal experience, can make students ponder what's noticed and what's not.

Pedagogical implications for ESL instruction

The study reveals that the participants who took part in the interviews were well aware of the verbal etiquette as an important aspect of the politeness principle in English-speaking countries, however, they failed to use well-formed polite expressions possibly due to the influence of their language thought pattern (L1).

This study found that the ESL learners' pragmatic failures were due to differences in linguistic forms, sociopragmatic norms, and variations in psychological characteristics with native-speakers. That is, interlanguage pragmatics is linked with linguistic, sociopragmatic, and psychological aspects. From the linguistic aspect, even the most proficient ESL learners cannot be expected to possess the same range of vocabulary, collocation, and idiomatic expressions as that of native speakers.

According to the definition of pragmatic failure is the inability to understand intended meaning in a speech act due to the lack of pragmatic competence. One of the major purposes of language is to communicate with one another in order to express meanings; aiding the principle of pragmatics – the study of speaker meaning. In the communicative acts of speakers, since the choice of form depends not only on the context, but also more crucially on the speakers' intention, interlocutors have to be skillful to make an accurate interpretation of the imbedded meanings within the sentence boundary (McConachy, 2019). As intercultural communication heightens due to extensive globalization, dealing with issues about other languages and cultures worldwide is becoming more quintessential. With the expansion of intercultural communication, many more people are learning a new language within a cultural context. And especially for those learning ESL, as English is considerably a wide-reaching international language nowadays, it is pivotal that an investigation of pragmatics must be carried out. To understand the disparities in the realization of speech acts for acquiring language learners from the non-native speakers of

English, a study was conducted of a Korean student and a New Zealand student using a compliment scenario. The paper is intended to provide pedagogical implications for ESL instruction with an investigation of pragmatic failure through the case study both of a Korean student learning English as a foreign language in Korea and a New Zealand student learning English as a mother tongue (L1).

Role of Cultural Awareness Training

English as a lingua franca (ELF) researchers argue that mutual intelligibility, not native speaker norms, is the essential goal of language study for learners who need English for international communication. Learners who become proficient in ELF thus develop and draw on their own norms of pronunciation, grammar, lexis and pragmatics. The use of formulaic sequences in conversation is one area of language that can be a source of misunderstanding for ESL learners. Intercultural training can improve L2 learners' knowledge of L2 norms, as well as their willingness to use these norms in intercultural interaction (McConachy, 2019). There is evidence that formal instruction can have a positive effect on learners' use of target language expressions that have been the focus of explicit cultural training.

Some ESL learners are able to use strategic learning to partially compensate for a lack of formal knowledge of L2 pragmatics. For example, they may use paraphrases or questions to clarify imprecisely encoded speech acts. ESL learners also sometimes adopt specific strategies to create the impression of relational politeness despite a failure to appropriately mitigate the inherently face threatening nature of a request or request refusal. However, the effectiveness of these strategies can be compromised by a lack of inference abilities, as was evident in the data showing that ESL learners were less successful than native speakers in recognizing concealed impoliteness and politeness. A lack of formal knowledge of L2 norms can also result in a tendency to code switch, as was found in a study tacit knowledge can both facilitate intuitions about target use and act as an internal monitor alerting learners to the possibility of pragmatic error. On the other hand, reliance on pre-existing socialization means that ESL learners may sometimes attribute pragmatic failures to sociological or discursive differences rather than cultural differences. There is evidence that the social relations modality can mediate how learners perceive cross-cultural pragmatics, and there have been proposals for a closer alignment between the teaching of intercultural communication and key concepts in the field of critical discourse analysis. Similarly in order to get a more nuanced understanding of how local norms of cultural behavior are implicated in cross-cultural communication it has been argued that the analysis of intercultural communication should be more attentive to the viewer's perspective on the indexical function of signs and the immediacy of exposure. It has also been suggested that video production tasks might be more effective than video perception tasks as a means of fostering learners' awareness of the importance of contextual factors in the interpretation of communicative acts. On the other hand, there is less consensus on the role of training in interpretation strategies.

Assessment of Current Teaching Materials

Despite the general philosophy that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) goes beyond language teaching as a mere instrument of communication and is, essentially, based on clear contents requiring specific cognitive tasks, recent debates in ESP teaching emphasize a return to a more traditional focus exclusively on language while neglecting broader intercultural skills and awareness; they thereby exclude class settings of intercultural dimensions (World English Journal & ZAGHAR, 2017). Following the hypotheses that lack of attention to intercultural aspects in the

classroom, in their wider frame, may lead to pragmatic failures in real-life interactions with members of different cultures, the assessment of the teaching materials through the content analysis of the most commonly used Business English (BE) textbooks in higher education in Italy was established.

Beyond all other considerations about the appropriateness of role and scope of textbooks in tertiary education and the integration of a teaching model which makes a less comprehensive use of them, the analysis points to a number of more specific items concerning their constraints in depicting clear-cut models of communicative genres and in showing schematic elements which can be misleading to L2 learners in that they may be interpreted as prescriptive of universal standards rather than as culture-specific devices. They are, in the first place, confined to selected, formal business genres, like e-mails, letters and CVs mainly, and partly also reports and meetings, and do not address other highly common ones, like small talk and phone communication, where miscommunication or communication failure is more likely too. On the one hand, textbook data, with their hermeneutic assumptions, cannot be taken fully as reliable evidence of how behavioral effects are actually influenced; on the other hand, at a more general level, they might vindicate a developing general theory concerning classroom-oriented pragmatic failures (Maurice Small, 2016).

Conclusion

This study delved into the crucial issue of pragmatic failures among ESL learners in intercultural communication contexts. It highlighted how these failures often stem not from a lack of vocabulary or grammar but from a misunderstanding or ignorance of sociolinguistic and pragmatic norms prevalent in native English-speaking cultures. Through various examples and case studies, such as inappropriate or overly direct requests and aggressive language misused in casual interactions, it became clear that ESL learners often struggle with appropriately adjusting their language according to cultural expectations. These communicative breakdowns may lead to unintended offense, misinterpretation, or alienation in intercultural exchanges. By focusing on both speech acts and the broader context in which these acts occur, the study underscores the need to integrate pragmatic competence alongside traditional language instruction.

The findings further suggest that addressing pragmatic failure requires not only enhancing students' linguistic abilities but also developing their intercultural awareness. Educators must prioritize pragmatic instruction, including role-plays, authentic interactions, and discussions on implied meanings in various cultural settings. A key takeaway is the importance of acknowledgment in ESL classrooms—students should be trained to recognize indirect speech acts and respond to them appropriately. Without such training, learners may unknowingly breach social norms and hinder effective communication. Thus, a more pragmatic-oriented curriculum and pedagogical approach can significantly improve ESL learners' communication skills, reduce misunderstandings, and foster more successful interactions in diverse cultural contexts.

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